

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000184

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [BA](#) [POL](#) [REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: AIRPORT RIOTERS SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS IN PRISON

REF: A. MANAMA 0080

[B](#). MANAMA 0049

[C](#). MANAMA 0013

[D](#). 05 MANAMA 1916

[E](#). 05 MANAMA 1910

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reasons: 1.
4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (U) Lower Criminal Court judge Ibrahim Al Zayed delivered a guilty verdict February 7 for 12 participants in a December 25 riot at the arrivals hall of Bahrain International Airport following the temporary detention of Shia cleric Shaikh Mohammed Al Sanad upon his return to Bahrain from Iran. The defendants were convicted for "taking part in an illegal gathering" but were cleared of charges of assaulting police officers and damaging public property. They were sentenced to two years in prison. Nine of the 12 defendants are in custody; three others have failed to respond to warrants for their arrest. One defendant was found not guilty and released. Seven other men are scheduled to appear in court February 15 on the same charges.

[1](#)2. (U) Attorneys for the accused were stunned with the verdict. Word had leaked that the only charge to hold was that of an illegal gathering and the defendants had expected to be released with time served or a maximum sentence of six months. Some 70 people had gathered outside the court prior to the verdict to demand the release of the men. Following the verdict, leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq President Shaikh Ali Salman urged those assembled to be calm and not resort to violence. The brother of one of those convicted told the press that his brother and the others were targeted because of their involvement in activities of the Committee for the Unemployed, the group that has organized many protests since the end of November that have descended into violence.

[1](#)3. (C) Shia MP Mohammed Al Shaikh, who has served as an intermediary for previous confrontations between police and the Committee for the Unemployed, told Pol/Econ Chief February 7 that people were surprised and angry about the sentence. They had expected a guilty verdict with a light sentence. Al Shaikh said that King Hamad needed to step in quickly to release the convicts with a sentence of time served. The verdict came on the eve of the two most important days of the Shia religious occasion of Ashura and, while there were no demonstrations, EmbOffs observed a gathering of about 500 men in the old town of Manama on the margins of the Ashura processions listening to a speaker denouncing the government for the convictions. Al Shaikh believes demonstrations will start in support of the men immediately following Ashura. An Embassy source said that a preacher in Hamad Town had railed against the verdict in his sermon the evening of February 7, and the speakers at February 10 Friday prayers are certain to focus on the case.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The airport riot case has created considerable turmoil thus far, including several clashes between supporters of the accused and security forces. Two aspects of the case are striking: (1) the unusual speed with which the investigation, trial, and conviction occurred, only six weeks after the event; and (2) the length of the sentence. A quick order by the King to release the men could help defuse additional tensions while reinforcing the legal process that resulted in the convictions. A precedent exists: the King ordered the release of activist Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja the same day of his conviction on charges of public incitement and spreading rumors that could disrupt national security in late 2004.

MONROE